The Melville Society NEWSLETTER

SEPTEMBER, 1952

Volume VIII Number 3

Exciting news comes to us in the form of an announcement by Robert G. Newman, librarian of the Berkshire Athenaeum in Pittsfield, that a Herman Melville Memorial Room will be established in the Athenaeum this winter.

Gifts recently accepted by this library now make it one of the three most important repositories (along with the Harvard University Library and the New York Public Library) of Melville materials. Dr. Henry A. Murray has recently donated several first editions of Melville's books, in addition to John Pinkerton's *Voyages and Travels* (pub. 1808-1814), Charles Wilkes' *Narrative of the United States Exploring Expedition* (pub. 1845), the Ames portrait of Maria Gansevoort, and other interesting items. Mrs. Eleanor Melville Metcalf, Melville's grand-daughter, has placed in the collection many of her grandfather's personal effects, including his famous serpentine-front mahogany desk and bookcase, his library table, the silver badge he wore as inspector of customs, the baptismal bowl used for his children, the tin bread-box in which his manuscripts were kept after his death, the Twitchell portrait (painted in Albany, 1847), his pipes, and additional personal mementoes. Other items have also been given to the library by Mrs. Walter B. Binnian, another grand-daughter, by Miss Agnes Morewood, a grand-niece, and by Mrs. Russell A. Hibbs, a former owner of Melville's "Arrowhead" farm.

According to present plans as indicated by Mr. Newman, the Herman Melville Memorial Room at Pittsfield will be decorated in a nautical motif. The ceiling and upper walls, representing the sky, will be painted a light blue; the lower walls are to be sea-green, with a gigantic figure of a white whale in a prominent position.

Public ceremonies to dedicate the room will be held as soon as its decoration has been completed and furniture is in place, probably during the month of November. All members of the Society are promised special invitations to attend the dedication ceremonies and will have permission to make use of the room for study in the future. It will be recalled that the establishment of a Melville Room was one of the original purposes for which the Society was founded in 1945. Any member wishing to contribute books, offprints of articles, photostatic reproductions, manuscript material, photographs, or anything else of use in Melville scholarship is hereby invited to make such additions to the collection.

NOTES

Of interest for students of Melville: *The American Writer and the European Tradition*, ed. Margaret Denny and William H. Gilman (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1950). $2.75.

Published in England: Ronald Mason, *The Spirit above the Dust: A Study of Herman Melville* (London: John Lehmann, 1951). $4.25.

Jay Leyda has recently given his entire collection of papers and correspondence amassed in the compilation of *The Melville Log* to the library of the University of California at Los Angeles.

Willard Thorp will spend the present academic year as visiting professor of American literature at Rice Institute (Houston, Texas).

C. L. R. James, the well-known British author now lecturing in the United States, discusses Melville and *Moby-Dick* in the fifth of six lecturers at Columbia University this autumn. General title of the series: "The Concept of Individual Personality in Western Civilization." Other authors discussed: Shakespeare, Milton, Rousseau, Dostoevsky.

As might be expected, *Moby-Dick* is one of the literary masterpieces included in *Great Books of the Western World*, ed. Robert Maynard Hutchins and others, 54 vols. (Chicago: Encyclopedia Britannica, 1952).

Was Melville a "negative" romanticist? It would appear so, according to the definition proposed by Morse Peckham in "Toward a Theory of Romanticism," *PMLA*, LXVI, 5-23 (March, 1951).

Virgil Thomson's commentary on *Billy Budd* as an opera (New York *Herald Tribune*, June 22, 1952): "*Billy Budd*, though musically the most sophisticated, the most accomplished of the (Benjamin) Britten operas, did seem in Paris to lack dramatic composition, communicative urgency. Part of its tedium, of course, came from the monotony of the male voice, unrelieved for four hours. But mostly it was due to the composer's (and presumably the librettists') unwillingness to give the story a point. All pathos and no moral makes a very dull opera."

The *Princeton Library Chronicle* has been receiving high praise from all quarters for its beautiful number (Winter, 1952) in which the catalogue of last year's Melville exhibition is printed.

In a talk before the American Library Association (New York, June 30, 1952) Lawrence Clark Powell, librarian of the University of California at Los Angeles, proposed that a monument in honor of Melville be erected on the Battery in Manhattan—"a monument in water-created limestone, containing a profusion of whales and books and Polynesian maidens!" Considerable interest in the proposal has been reported, and some steps have been taken to carry it into effect. The talk, entitled "The Alchemy of Books," is printed in the *A.L.A. Bulletin*, XLVI, 266-272 (September, 1952).

The Stanford Players of Stanford University presented the Coxe-Chapman version of *Billy Budd* in the institution's Memorial Auditorium on May 1, 2, and 3 of this year. Audience reaction and reviews were generally regarded as very favorable.

Reprints of the supplement to the Sealts check-list of Melville's reading are now available. Write for copies to Merton M. Sealts, Lawrence College, Appleton, Wisconsin. The exact price has not yet been determined.

Victor Hugo Paltsits, who was in large part responsible for the acquisition of so much valuable Melville material at the New York Public Library, turned eighty-five in July and still retains a youthful interest in Melville scholarship.

Ernest E. Leisy discussed Melville during the past summer in his seminar at the University of Bonn (Germany). He has now returned to his regular post at Southern Methodist University.

An article on Melville by Professor Kathleen Fitzpatrick, acting professor of history at the University of Melbourne (Australia), is forthcoming in the Australian "little" magazine, *Meanjin*.

Jean Simon, professor at the University of Lille (France), hopes to do an article on Melville's later years for the French reading public.

Lawrence Clark Powell's essay, "My Melville," which appeared in *Hoja Volante*, is now reprinted in his new volume entitled *Islands of Books* (Los Angeles: Ward Ritchie Press, 1952). $4.00.

The proposed "offprint service" of the Society is not yet in operation.

The only outstanding debt of the Society (to the Harvard Library) has been reduced this summer to approximately $23. If those members who have not paid their dues for the current year will do so at once, our treasury will again be able to record its figures in black.

CAMBRIDGE MEETING

The Conference Room of the Lamont Library at Harvard University has been reserved for a meeting of the Society on Monday afternoon, December 29. The hour scheduled is three o'clock. Should there be a luncheon of the American Literature Group lasting into the afternoon, as there was at our New York meeting two years ago, three-thirty may prove to be a better hour. As usual, we meet in connection with the annual convention of the Modern Language Association.

President Willard Thorp has arranged what should be a highly interesting program. Its principal agenda are the following:

I. Personal Reminiscences and Family History (Mrs. Eleanor Melville Metcalf).

II. The Significance of Recent Biographical Studies of Melville (Howard Horsford, Princeton University).

III. Critiques of Three Recent Critical Works (Richard Chase's *Herman Melville: A Critical Study*, by Walter E. Bezanson, Rutgers University; Newton Arvin's *Herman Melville*, probably by Harrison Hayford, Northwestern University; and Lawrence Thompson's *Melville's Quarrel with God*, by Merton M. Sealts, Lawrence College).

IV. Reports and Discussion: *Moby-Dick* centennial volume; Hendricks House edition of Melville's works; Melville bibliography; format and purpose of the Newsletter; and other matters.

Our meetings have always been open to anyone interested in attending. Please feel free to invite wives, husbands, friends, and colleagues. Any change in the hour of meeting (though none is anticipated at present) will be reported to the Information Desk at the M.L.A. convention.

The staff of the Harvard University Library, to whom we owe our gratitude for providing a comfortable meeting room, is planning to place on display some of the Melville treasures in the Harvard collection.

THE *Melville Society* NEWSLETTER IS PUBLISHED QUARTERLY FOR MEMBERS OF THE Melville Society, a group of literary scholars and others interested in the life and works of Herman Melville. The Society seeks to facilitate the exchange of information among its members, to stimulate the study of Melville's life and works, and to encourage literary, historical, and bibliographical research. Executive committee: Willard Thorp (1952), president; Eleanor Melville Metcalf (1953); Merton M. Sealts (1954); William H. Gilman (1955); Walter E. Bezanson (1956). The annual membership fee of two dollars includes subscription to the Newsletter and other services. Address Tyrus Hillway, secretary, Colorado State College, Greeley, Colorado.